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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KAMPALA 001411

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [UG](#)

SUBJECT: UGANDA: OPPOSITION CANDIDATE OTUNNU ESCAPES UNHURT FROM  
UNUSUAL AUTO ACCIDENT

REF: KAMPALA 01024

CLASSIFIED BY: Aaron Sampson, Pol/Econ Chief, State, Pol/Econ;  
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Former UN diplomat and presidential hopeful Olara Otunnu escaped unhurt from a road accident with vehicles belonging to the Presidential Guard Brigade (PGB) on December 21. Police and the PGB declared the incident an accident and blamed Otunnu's driver. Otunnu said the "sequence and circumstances" of the accident were "highly unusual" and that two PGB vehicles deliberately ran him off the road. An AmCit riding with Otunnu told EmbOffs that the accident appeared to be a setup as PGB officers involved in the incident were driving vehicles without license plates, wore uniforms without name patches, and knew the identities of the five people in Otunnu's car. End Summary

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Otunnu Escapes Unscathed  
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¶2. (SBU) Olara Otunnu, who returned to Uganda in early December after several months abroad (ref. A), escaped unharmed from a road accident with a convoy of six to seven PGB military vehicles about 30KM south of Gulu on December 21. Approximately 3,800 soldiers belong to the PGB. On December 20, Otunnu, President Museveni, and other senior political leaders attended the consecration of northern Uganda's new Anglican Bishop in Gulu. Museveni subsequently returned to Kampala by air. Otunnu and the PGB detachment were both returning to Kampala when the accident occurred. Police and the PGB blamed the accident on Otunnu's driver, claiming he lost control while trying to pass the military vehicles. "As he was overtaking a lorry in our convoy," said PGB spokesman Capt. Edison Kwesiga, "he somehow got off the road and hit an anthill and then a jeep, the fourth car in our motorcade, and went off the road into the bush." Two soldiers were reportedly lightly injured.

¶3. (SBU) Otunnu offered a somewhat different account, stating that the PGB convoy was "either still, not moving, or moving at a snail's pace," and that one of the military cars swerved to force Otunnu off the road as he was attempting to pass. Otunnu said that immediately after the accident, the PGB surrounded his vehicle with guns drawn, wearing uniforms without name tags and calling Otunnu's name. He also noted that none of the PGB vehicles had license plates. Otunnu described "the sequence and circumstances" of the incident as "highly unusual". Speaking to the Daily Monitor newspaper, Otunnu said the accident was a "very close shave with death" and that he "cannot believe we are alive."

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Other Unusual Details

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¶4. (C) On December 22, an AmCit who is making a documentary film about the Ugandan presidential campaign and was in Otunnu's car at the time of the accident, told EmbOffs that the accident appeared to be a deliberate attempt to either injure or intimidate Otunnu. The filmmaker said the PGB vehicles were moving very slowly or stopped at an isolated point outside of Gulu when they signaled for Otunnu to pass. As Otunnu overtook the convoy, one of the PGB vehicles swerved, forcing Otunnu's vehicle onto the shoulder. The filmmaker said Otunnu's car hit something on the shoulder but the driver managed to retain control. A second PGB vehicle then swerved, colliding with Otunnu and sending his car caroming off the road and into the bush. The filmmaker said he and his fellow passengers were lucky the car did not roll or run into nearby structures or trees.

¶5. (C) The filmmaker also said the PGB vehicles sported no license plates and the soldiers who surrounded Otunnu's car wore uniforms

KAMPALA 00001411 002 OF 002

with blank velcro strips where their name patches should have been. The soldiers also knew the names of everyone in Otunnu's vehicle, including the filmmaker's. He recognized nearly all of the soldiers as the same men who prevented him from filming the Bishop's coronation the day before. He said that when he asked individual PGB officers for their names following the accident, they either refused or provided false names. One PGB soldier identified himself as Maj. John Mugisha, but the filmmaker recalled that the patch on this soldier's uniform the day before bore a different name. The soldiers prevented the AmCit from filming the accident's aftermath and attempted unsuccessfully to confiscate his camera equipment.

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Comment: Something Sinister or an Accident?

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¶6. (C) Roads in Uganda are notoriously dangerous and hardly a week goes by without news of at least one horrific accident involving the death of a well known Ugandan citizen. The absence of name patches on the PGB uniforms, the apparent erratic PGB maneuvers that forced Otunnu from the road after he was apparently waved past, and advance knowledge of the names of those in Otunnu's vehicle raise suspicion. Ugandan authorities normally use spurious charges of sedition and treason to hobble political opponents and hamper their movements. A staged road accident, if true, would raise the stakes considerably. The incident does not appear to have been an accident, nor have we heard a reasonable explanation for the PGB's actions and appearance.

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